

DPH narrative report for Covid-19

Purpose

This report is to provide an update to the Covid-19 related governance system and the regional convener for the national contain programme on localities that have triggered national or regional areas of interest and escalation. This will enable consistent and key headline messages from localities to be fed into system leader discussions and to ensure local considerations.

This will also enable identification of any areas which may require additional support.

Director of Public Health: Colin Cox

Local authority: Cumbria

Date: 23 November 2020

Key issues to cover

Please ensure you provide a narrative for points 1-3 in your report as this will be the basis of reporting into national systems

1. Please provide an overview of epidemiology and trends, contextualised with soft intelligence and conclusions about the drivers for transmission.
(No need to repeat epidemiology in the reports, but the key intelligence from the data)

- Overall the rates in Cumbria are relatively stable and below the England average at around 200-220 cases per 100k per week.
- Most recently attention has focused on South Lakeland, where the trend still appears to be upwards.
- Both Barrow and South Lakeland have seen rising rates in the over-60s, around half of which appears to be associated with care homes.
- Rates of hospital admissions may be stabilising in the South Cumbria (Morecambe Bay) area, potentially associated with previously falling case rates in Barrow. However they are still rising in North Cumbria, which alongside system challenges in urgent and emergency care pathway flows and discharge arrangements, and a social care sector that has been significantly impacted by Covid-19, is combining to make hospital services difficult for staff and patients. North Cumbria's hospitals are managing multiple outbreaks exacerbated by the occupancy levels, environment, and high numbers of medically optimised patients continuing to reside in hospital. The risk of further outbreaks due to these issues is high and a matter of concern for the Health Protection Board. The existing outbreaks in the service may well be contributing to the continued rising of cases in the wider community.

2. What are the clear associated actions you / your Health Protection Board are planning to take to address the issues identified?

- The local health system is coping presently but in North Cumbria some parts are nearing the point where elective capacity may need to be reduced. Further discussions are underway about this possibility.
- The North Cumbria system is progressing an improvement plan supported by NHSE/I and the LGA to support patient flow and discharge arrangements; the CCG and County Council are establishing additional interim bed capacity; and arrangements for designated Covid-positive discharge are being finalised.
- We have now begun to progress as an area for locally supported contact tracing. We are progressing this as a high priority.
- We are moving at pace to establish a service for routine testing using the nationally available Lateral Flow tests.
- Planning is underway to increase capacity for enforcement of the national regulations.

3(a) Please identify any wider implications or potential risks you can see e.g. potential for cross border transmission, large employers impacted.

- As noted above, we are close to the point where the hospital system in North Cumbria may need to make decisions on prioritisation of elective care in order to manage capacity challenges.
- The difference in measures between England and Scotland risks creating complexity and confusion around cross-border traffic, as many people in the area live in one jurisdiction and work in, shop in or visit the other routinely. This has been particularly highlighted this week with the changes to the travel rules in Scotland, which have created widespread confusion as to what cross-border travel is permitted.

3(b) Please specify any support you feel you need to respond to this situation.

- The lack of connectivity between the national contact tracing system and the local outbreak control system is becoming an increasing problem as the number of cases rises. While the Locally Supported Contact Tracing system will in part address this, our ideal situation is that in Cumbria we would take over the full Tier 2 function of contacting all index cases. We understand that there is not currently a mechanism to enable this. We would urge the national system to put this in place so contact tracing can genuinely become “local by default”.
- We are now experiencing some challenges in local contact tracing associated with the use of the Test and Trace App, in particular the QR code check-in system. While previous systems were far from perfect, if our local contact tracers wanted to find out who had been in a particular venue, they could get that (admittedly often very partial) information from the venue. Now that it’s all being done by the App, we have no access to this information. A way of enabling local areas to contact people associated with particular venues would be extremely valuable. ***Still awaiting a response***

- National guidance is increasingly including the following wording 'unless you are contacted by an NHS track and trace service you do not need to isolate'. This is creating a difficult situation for schools, who have to advise close contacts in the school setting to isolate. Some parents are challenging the advice from schools and not isolating their children (quoting the wording in the national guidance). Please consider amending this wording. ***Still awaiting a response***
- There is an issue with the support payment grants for people isolating when advised to isolate by local track and trace teams. Local track and trace teams are unable to give individuals an NHS track and trace ID (and they can't be fed back into the national system to obtain an ID). Therefore, people being asked by local track and trace teams to isolate are unable to access support payments. Please can the system be updated so tier 1 track and trace services can issue NHS track and trace IDs. ***Still awaiting a response***